

## Follow the Sirens to the Cross

*April 16, 2008*

(Palm Sunday - Year A)

Matthew 26:36 - 27:61

*St. Alban's Episcopal Church, Waco, Texas*

I must have been about 4 or 5 years old, when I remember riding with my mom in the car, after lunch time, after having gotten out of pre-school at noon.

And while we were driving down the busy street, we began to hear sirens, then we saw fire trucks whizzing past us.

First, there was 1 fire truck.

Then, there was a second fire truck.

Then, a third, a fourth and a fifth fire truck, all speeding past us.

We wondered where all these fire trucks were going to.

And my mom guessed that to have that many fire trucks rushing to the scene, there must be some huge building on fire.

I begged my mom to follow the fire trucks, so we could see what was going on.

At first, my mom said that we shouldn't go to see the scene of someone else's tragedy.

Yet, after my continued begging, finally, my mom relented.

She turned the car around and we began to follow the parade of fire trucks, headed to the disaster.

After about a mile, we came upon a huge apartment complex, an apartment complex engulfed in licking flames and billowing smoke.

Firemen rushed around yelling at each other.

Hoses filled with water snaked around on the sidewalk.

And, me and my mom, along with dozens of others, gathered and gawked at this awful scene of destruction.

It was the first time in my life when I can remember being drawn to gaze at the scene of tragedy.

And, I knew, instinctively, that what we were doing - turning our car

around to watch a giant apartment building burn to the ground - was not honorable.

Yet, at the same time, I knew, instinctively, that it is a part of human nature to want to follow the sound of the sirens and to look at human tragedy.

Two thousand years ago, the city of Jerusalem is filled with good Jews who have come to observe the Passover in the holy city.

On that infamous Friday, people are going about their business, picking up children early from school, heading to the grocery store for last minute lamb and matzah before more relatives arrive.

Then, they hear the sirens, and turn their cars around to follow the parade to Pilate's place.

There, in front of Pilate, is standing the nut case from Galilee who claimed to be the Messiah, and a man named Barabbas, who is on death row.

The gawking at the latest human tragedy has begun.

Then, the tragedy of the hour progresses from the place of Pilate to the place of Golgotha, the place of the Skull.

Roman soldiers rush around yelling at each other.

Wood beams and nails are strewn on the ground.

And the crowd yells at the man from Galilee:

“Let him be crucified!”

The gawking crowd watches the Son of God destruct and breathe his last, while nailed to a cross.

And then, the people move on to the next tragedy of the hour.

This story is perfectly suited for CNN or Fox News.

We watch as the news of Jesus' crucifixion is reported in a one-inch border that continually runs across the bottom of our TV screen, matter-of-factly reporting:

“Jesus, the alleged King of the Jews, dies in Jerusalem today at 3pm.”

We gawk at the fall of the Governor of New York, Eliot Spitzer, and of the destruction of the true victims, his wife and daughters, as this

family's collapse became the media entertainment of the hour during this past week.

We follow the sirens and the fire trucks to see human tragedy in all its rawness and reality.

We rush to the scene of human self-destruction.

That is, unless the victim of the tragedy is *us*.

For when Jesus is nailed to the Cross, he hears painful and tragic words as the crowd yells out at him:

“Can't you save yourself?

If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross!”

And likewise, *we* hear painful words in the tragedy of life.

Like when the doctor says:

“The biopsy indicates that the lump is cancerous.”

Like when the president of the company says:

“We're going to have to eliminate your position.”

Like when your spouse says:

“I have been seeing someone else.”

Like when the people who have followed the sirens say:

“Let him be crucified!”

You see, my friends, the Cross of Jesus Christ fully acknowledges, without flinching, that it is human nature for us to gawk at human tragedy.

And also, the Cross of Jesus Christ fully acknowledges, without flinching, that God in human flesh knows, understands, experiences, comprehends and feels our greatest tragedies of the hour.

So, in this week ahead,

Turn your car around and follow the sirens to the foot of the Cross, as

we observe this holy week in this church.  
Turn your eyes upon Jesus, the ultimate Victim, who has felt and known  
and experienced the depth of your own worst tragedies.

For God takes our biggest disasters, our greatest losses, our deepest  
tragedies, and on the third day.....

You'll have to come back to hear the rest of the sermon.

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